

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
INFO CINCEUR

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TAGS: PFOR

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING
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GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL
CINCEUR FOR POLAD

FOR YOUR INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS

FROM DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S PRESS BRIEFING JUNE 5, 1975:

Q. THE ISRAELI MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION YESTERDAY SAID THAT EGYPT HAD GIVEN THIS COUNTRY A WRITTEN COMMITMENT THAT IT WOULD ALLOW ISRAELI CARGOES TO TRANSIT THE SUEZ CANAL WHEN IT WAS REOPENED. CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT UNDERSTANDINGS THERE ARE WITH EGYPT ABOUT ISRAELI CARGOES IN THE CANAL?

A. NO, I CANNOT. YOU WILL RECALL THAT AT THAT TIME, WE HAD INDICATED THAT THERE WERE CERTAIN OF THE UNDERSTANDINGS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT WHICH WERE NOT MADE PUBLIC.

YOU WILL ALSO RECALL THAT WE STATED AT THAT TIME THAT WE HAD INFORMED THE PROPER COMMITTEES OF THE CONGRESS OF ALL THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTS.

Q. WELL, EGYPT IS NOW SAYING THAT ISRAELI GOODS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO TRANSIT THE CANAL UNLESS ISRAEL MAKES CERTAIN FURTHER CONCESSIONS OR BEHAVES ACCORDING TO A CERTAIN CODE OF CONDUCT. IS THAT A POSITION THAT YOU REGARDS AS HELPFUL?

A. I THINK ON THIS WHOLE SUBJECT OF THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT -- LET'S JUST SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

Q. WILL THE UNITED STATES INSIST ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE UNDERSTANDINGS AND AGREEMENTS REACHED IN THE FIRST DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT?

A. I THINK THIS WHOLE GENERAL SUBJECT DEPENDS UPON INTERPRETATION, AND WHAT IS COMPLIANCE AND WHAT IS NOT COMPLIANCE -- AND IT WOULD BE A SUBJECT, I SUPPOSE, OF FURTHER DISCUSSION.

BUT I THINK IN GENERAL, OBVIOUSLY, IF WE ARE GOING TO UNCLASSIFIED

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HAVE A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, BOTH SIDES ARE GOING TO HAVE TO MOVE TO IMPLEMENTATION OF VARIOUS STEPS ALREADY AGREED AND ONES TO BE AGREED IN THE FUTURE.

Q. BUT IF ISRAELI'S CARGO IS SHIPPED ON ANOTHER NATION'S VESSELS THROUGH THE SUEZ CANAL, WOULD YOU EXPECT EGYPT TO ALLOW ITS PASSAGE?

A. I THINK YOU WILL HAVE TO ASK EGYPT ABOUT THAT.

Q. NO, NOT IF THE UNITED STATES IS THE GUARANTOR.

Q. I'M ASKING WHAT YOU WOULD EXPECT, NOT EGYPT.

A. WELL, LET'S JUST WAIT AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

Q. IN THIS, DID PRESIDENT SADAT WRITE A LETTER OF ASSURANCE TO PRESIDENT NIXON ABOUT THIS?

A. I HAVE JUST SAID THAT THERE WERE CERTAIN UNDERSTANDINGS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT WHICH WERE NOT MADE PUBLIC. HOWEVER, WE DID INFORM THE CONGRESS OF ALL THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTS AND, AS WE SAID THEN AND CONTINUE TO SAY, IT IS JUST NOT APPROPRIATE FOR US ON THIS PODIUM TO DISCUSS OUR CONFIDENTIAL EXCHANGES WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS.

Q. REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE CONTENTS ARE, EGYPT IS SAYING TODAY, OR YESTERDAY, THAT IT HAS NO SECRET AGREEMENTS WITH ANYBODY REGARDING THIS SUBJECT.

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?

A. OH, I DID NOT SEE THAT REPORT. WHERE DID YOU SEE THAT?

Q. IT'S BEEN ON THE REUTERS WIRE FOR TWO DAYS. TODAY AND YESTERDAY.

A. I THINK I'LL LET EGYPT SPEAK FOR EGYPT, AND ISRAEL FOR ISRAEL, AND WE WILL SPEAK FOR OURSELVES.

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Q. WELL, THE UNITED STATES DID PLAY A VERY LARGE ROLE IN THE 1974 DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT.

A. YES.

Q. THE UNITED STATES HAS ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE WERE CERTAIN UNDERSTANDINGS THAT WERE KEPT PRIVATE BUT ABOUT WHICH CONGRESS WAS INFORMED.

A. YES.

Q. WHAT IS THE DUTY OF THE UNITED STATES AS -- HAVING PERFORMED THAT ROLE? AND WHAT DUTY HAS IT TOLD CONGRESS IT WILL PERFORM AT SUCH TIME? AND WHAT MECHANISM HAS TO OCCUR TO MAKE IT GO INTO ACTION?

A. I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO THOSE QUESTIONS. I WILL CHECK INTO THEM.

HOWEVER, ALL ASPECTS OF THAT AGREEMENT HAVE BEEN -- THE CONGRESS HAS BEEN INFORMED ABOUT THEM.

Q. WELL, THAT'S FAIR ENOUGH. BUT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO

DISCUSS THE AGREEMENT, THAT MAY BE ONE THING. BUT THE UNITED STATES MIGHT HAVE A CERTAIN ROLE TO PLAY, AND I THINK IT'S OUR ROLE TO BE ABLE TO INFORM THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WHAT ROLE THIS GOVERNMENT IS GOING TO PLAY.

AND NOW SEEMS TO BE THE TIME THAT THIS IS GOING TO BECOMING IMPORTANT.

A. BUT PERHAPS IT'S NOT QUITE THE TIME TODAY. AND I THINK THAT CONCERN OVER OUR ROLE IS WHY WE HAVE DECLINED TO DISCUSS IN PUBLIC THE DETAILS OF THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT.

Q. DOES THE UNITED STATES AGREE WITH PRESIDENT SADAT THAT THE OPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL WAS A STEP TOWARD PEACE.

A. YES, AND I THINK WE HAVE SAID THAT PUBLICLY.

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Q. LET ME JUST POSE ONE QUESTION WHICH PERHAPS SOMEONE UPSTAIRS MIGHT CARE TO ANSWER: I THINK I CAN FRAME IT MORE ACCURATELY:

FOLLOWING THE JANUARY 1974 DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT, THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT STATED PUBLICLY IN A KNESSET ON AT LEAST TWO OCCASIONS THAT A FORMAL LETTER WAS RECEIVED FROM PRESIDENT NIXON TO PREMIER MEIR STATING THAT AMONG OTHER THINGS THE EGYPTIANS HAD TOLD THE UNITED STATES REASON TO -- OR TOLD THE UNITED STATES TWO THINGS:

ONE, THAT THE SUEZ CANAL WOULD BE OPENED.

AND TWO, THAT ISRAELI-BOUND CARGOES WOULD BE PERMITTED IN THE CANAL.

SUBSEQUENTLY, AMERICAN OFFICIALS, ON BACKGROUND, HAVE CONFIRMED BOTH OF THOSE STATEMENTS.

THE QUESTION REALLY IS: HAS THE UNITED STATES GOTTEN ANY ASSURANCES FROM THE EGYPTIANS, SINCE MARCH, WHEN THE CURRENT TALKS BROKE DOWN, THAT THE EGYPTIANS WOULD LIVE UP TO THOSE COMMITMENTS?

OBTAINING THE CANAL BEING OPEN IS ONE OF THEM.

AND HAVE THE EGYPTIANS TOLD THE UNITED STATES THAT THEY WOULD CARRY OUT THE CARGO PASSAGE? OR HAVE THEY CHANGED THEIR MIND ON THAT ONE?

AND IF SO, WHAT IS THE AMERICAN VIEW?

A. I JUST DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION AND I WILL LOOK INTO IT.

Q. DOES THE UNITED STATES RECOGNIZE THE SUEZ CANAL AS AN INTERNATIONAL WATERWAY?

AND WHAT IS OUR POLICY IN REGARD TO THE RESTRICTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL WATERWAY -- TO BARRING CARGOES FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES COMING THROUGH?
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A. I BELIEVE IN GENERAL THE STATUS OF THE SUEZ CANAL DATES BACK TO A RATHER -- TO A TREATY COVERING THE TRANSIT OF THAT CANAL IN PEACETIME -- AND I THINK I'LL REFER YOU JUST TO THE DETAILS OF THAT CONVENTION.

ON THE SUEZ, BEFORE WE LEAVE THAT, I DID WANT TO MAKE A COMMENT ON THE REMARKS IN AN EDITORIAL IN THIS MORNING'S PAPER, WHICH SAID THAT "SECRETARY KISSINGER APPARENTLY FELT COMPELLED TO DISMISS THE ISRAELI MOVE OF THINING OUT ITS FORCES AS NOT DECISIVE."

WE FEEL THAT THE COMMENT IN THE EDITORIAL TOOK OUT OF CONTEXT WHAT THE SECRETARY HAD ACTUALLY SAID, THUS RISKING GIVING AN ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATION TO THE SECRETARY'S REACTION.

YOU WILL RECALL THAT AT THE NEWS CONFERENCE IN SALZBURG-- AND I THINK SOME OF YOU WERE THERE -- ON JUNE 2ND, WHEN ASKED FOR HIS REACTION TO THE ISRAELI THINNING OUT OF FORCES IN SINAI, HE REPLIED -- AND I QUOTE FROM THAT TRANSCRIPT WHICH, INCIDENTALLY WE ISSUED IN A PRESS RELEASE "WE THINK THAT THIS IS A CONSTRUCTIVE MOVE. IT HAS CLEARLY THE INTENTION OF EASING POSSIBLE EGYPTIAN CONCERNS ABOUT ISRAELI ARTILLERY IN RANGE OF THE CANAL AND, WHILE NOT DECISIVE -- NO UNILATERAL STEP CAN BE A DECISIVE STEP AT THIS POINT -- I THINK IT IS A HELPFUL CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROCESS WHICH THE UNITED STATES IS STRONGLY ATTEMPTING TO ENCOURAGE IN WHICH BOTH PARTIES SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO MOVE TOWARD PEACE."

Q. THERE IS ONE MORE CONSIDERATION, PERHAPS, AS THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT -- AS BERNIE RECALLS -- MADE IT PUBLIC WHAT WAS IN THESE "SECRET" MESSAGES BETWEEN THE TWO PRESIDENTS.

ARE YOU STILL OBLIGED TO KEEP IT SECRET?

A. WE ARE ONLY SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT OUR PRACTICE IS AND I AM STATING TODAY -- AND OBVIOUSLY, I CHECKED INTO IT BEFORE I CAME DOWN HERE -- THAT WE ARE NOT GOING TO DIS-
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CUSS PUBLICLY FROM THIS FORUM THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE
CONFIDENTIAL EXCHANGES.

Q. WHICH COMMITTEES WERE INFORMED?

A. I DON'T KNOW WHICH COMMITTEES WERE INFORMED, BUT I WILL
TRY TO GET YOU AS COMPLETE A LIST AS IS AVAILABLE. I'LL
CHECK WITH THE OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS.

Q. WHEN MRS. MEIR MADE CERTAIN THINGS PUBLIC IN THE
KNESSET IT WAS ON THE BASIS OF A LETTER FROM THE UNITED
STATES PRESIDENT, SHE SAID, TO HER.

NOW THE FINAL QUESTION IS -- OR MY PART OF THE QUESTION

IS: DID THE EGYPTIANS PROVIDE A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT
ON WHICH HE BASED HIS LETTER TO MRS. MEIR?

A. I DON'T KNOW.

Q. ONE FINAL THING IN THIS WHOLE THING, NOW:

YOU SAID YOU SAW NO RELEVANCE TO VIET-NAM. THERE IS NO
DIRECT CONNECTION OR NO ORGANIC CONNECTION, OR ANYTHING
LIKE THAT -- BUT I THINK THAT THE TENOR OF THE QUESTIONING
INDICATES THAT THERE IS A HERITAGE OF DOUBT ABOUT WHAT THE
AMERICAN GOVERNMENT SAYS, WHEN IT BEGINS TALKING ABOUT
CONFIDENTIAL OR SECRET UNDERSTANDINGS, WHICH WERE MADE IN
CONNECTION WITH PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED UNDERSTANDINGS.

AND I WOULD HOPE THAT IN THE EFFORT TO DISSIPATE THIS
HERITAGE, EVENTUALLY, YOU WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO GET
WHAT LOOKS LIKE IT SHOULD BE OBTAINABLE, IN VIEW OF THE
PORTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE PUBLIC BY OTHER PEOPLE.

THAT'S ALL I WOULD LIKE TO PUT IN THERE.

A. ALL RIGHT. KISSINGER

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